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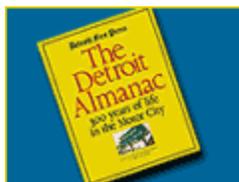
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## Lawmakers OK a hold on Lakes drilling

### 2-year moratorium praised, attacked

November 2, 2001

**BY HUGH MCDIARMID JR.**

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

New Great Lakes oil and gas drilling would be banned for two years under legislation approved Thursday by the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate.

The law, passed by the Senate early Thursday evening, drew bitter criticism from Gov. John Engler and praise from opponents of lake-bed mineral exploration.

"It means nothing's going to happen for at least two years, and that's good news," said Keith Schneider, program director at the Michigan Land Use Institute in Benzonia.

He predicted the federal action -- sponsored by Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich. -- would energize efforts to impose a state ban on new lakes drilling. Michigan lawmakers may vote on that proposal next month.

Support for a state ban has grown even as the Engler-led Department of Natural Resources takes applications from companies who want to lease bottomlands for drilling.

"I think Michigan has turned a corner on valuing its natural resources," Schneider said. "I don't think the state Legislature wants to be upstaged by Congress."

The federal rule requires a study of the environmental impact of drilling by the Army

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Corps of Engineers during the two-year moratorium.

Engler lashed out at the federal action as an unwarranted intrusion into state matters.

"Today, Washington wants to dictate how Michigan protects the waters of the Great Lakes. Tomorrow, Washington could well dictate who gets the water," Engler said in a press release. Great Lakes water already is protected from diversion by a multistate compact authorized by Congress, said Dave Lemmon, communications director for Stabenow.

He said the federal government has a role in the drilling issue because it involves interstate transport -- both of the water that moves among Great Lakes states and potential pollution that could affect multiple states.

"But it's important to keep an eye on the fact that Michigan is the only one of eight Great Lakes states that allows drilling," Lemmon said.

Seven slant wells now pipe oil and gas from underneath the Lakes to pumps on shore.

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